



## STATE OF WASHINGTON

### DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES P.O. Box 45040, Olympia, Washington 98504-5040

December 20, 2005

Braam Oversight Panel  
110 Fifth Avenue SE, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Panel Members:

The Department again would like to thank the Panel for the work done on the Design and Specifications Report. We appreciate the attention you have given to all of the public and written comments and the incorporation of some of our comments into your report.

This is the Children's Administration's (CA) response to the Panel Design and Specifications Report dated December 5, 2005. It includes a letter regarding Professional Standards, documents containing information regarding the staging of the Benchmarks, and a matrix showing a comparison of high priority CA initiatives. We are engaged in developing high level cost estimates and an initial analysis indicates that new resources will be required in many areas.

We are very concerned that the Panel's report contains too many Benchmarks and Action Steps. Focus and strategy must be a part of any successful plan. Working on too many things at once, or targeting the wrong things, will not allow the organization to succeed or sustain performance over time. Without the right foundation, even with all of the necessary financial and staff resources, we will not be able to do our best work to keep children safe, strengthen families to enable them to keep their children safe, and provide loving stable permanent families for children who cannot return home.

Change must be focused on the entire body of work done by the administration. Foster Care is one part of the larger child welfare system. Of the more than 240,000 individuals we serve each year, 8,000 of them are children in foster care at any point in time during the year. We absolutely want the best for every child that is served by the Children's Administration. That means we must do our initial work well, providing for child safety, engaging families in effective services so that children never need to come into care or are able to return home quickly. For a child who needs another permanent home, we must identify and support that home through the child's transition into a new and "forever" family.

Significant system reform requires a number of essential foundational changes in order to be successful.

- Organizational leadership must be committed to change, and the change must be "owned" throughout all parts of the organization. Many reform efforts do not succeed because

organizational readiness is not factored into the work that needs to be done to accept and sustain the required changes.

- Adequate resources are needed to make the change possible. Many times that will require new resources, and other times it will require making complex decisions about the deployment of existing resources. As you are aware, social workers are already working hard at high pressure, fast paced jobs. Requiring them to do even more, with the same amount of resources, compound the vulnerabilities the system change is trying to address. Maximizing the use of existing staff resources in an under-resourced system requires thoughtful planning and a strategy that ensures that the energy is focused on the highest priority activities that address more than symptoms whenever possible.
- Timing is everything. The organization must have the capacity to change in a planful way. Change must be implemented at a pace that is as expeditious as possible, but does not overwhelm the system.
- The change needs to start with the right foundation. It needs to be imbedded in the very heart of the system, addressing organizational culture, organizational structure, and the way that work is approached and done. In Children's Administration, among other things, this means the development of a clinical practice model to clarify and improve our work with children and families.

The Children's Administration's leadership team is committed to improvement through change. We have had initial discussions, throughout all levels of the Administration, about what our strategic priorities should be. In addressing the entire scope of work of the organization, we have outlined six major areas of focus that will build a strong foundation for achieving and sustaining outcomes.

Redesign CPS/CWS delivery  
Develop a new practice model  
Implement a new State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS)  
Develop a new financial management model  
Change the organizational culture  
Improve contracted services and business processes

The Governor identified child safety as our first priority. The Panel and plaintiff's attorneys have agreed that child safety is the highest priority. We are meeting the Governor's directives to improve response times on reports of abuse and neglect and are working on more frequent visits with children in in-home and out-of-home care.

We must also weave in the requirements that were established with a less holistic framework in mind, which includes our response to the Braam Settlement Agreement and the federal Program Improvement Plan (PIP). You can understand our concern about the critical nature of staging as the settlement is finalized. We want to achieve the very best we can within the resources appropriated to meet our mission and address our obligations to Braam and PIP. We want to improve our system. We want to succeed. But we cannot do that if the pace of change is too rapid and the focus of change does not allow us the time to accomplish the foundation-building that must be done.

We all have a common goal—to improve the lives of children and families—and we have shared our concerns about how to accomplish this. To reiterate, here are some major issues and additional

concerns regarding the staging and measurement of the Benchmarks and the Professional Standards included in the Panel's December 5, 2005, report.

### **Benchmarks**

Upon review of the Benchmark dates set for all six areas of the Settlement Agreement, we found that the Department is to be measured against the majority of them within the next two years. Although we understand and feel the need to improve outcomes for children and families as quickly as possible, the resources and workload associated with this are not available.

We have attached an alternate staging plan for the Panel to consider. Our staging allows the Department time to request resources where necessary and address the different Outcomes in a more planful manner that does not overwhelm our system quite as much at the onset. However, this is still an ambitious schedule to meet. Resources will be necessary for many of the Benchmarks and Action Steps. We will be able to better assess what these are once we have the necessary baseline information defined and measured.

We developed the staging based on the principles outlined in our November 2, 2005, letter and list of criteria to the Panel, and also take into account the suggestions made by the Plaintiff's Attorneys in their letter of November 18, 2005, regarding priority-setting. To reiterate, the order of our priorities are: Safety, Placement Stability, Remediation, and Growth and Development. The Department and the Plaintiff's Attorneys' both recognize the need for additional funds, and the need to rely on outside partners and data system improvements. The latter will not be completed for three more years assuming funding is provided.

The Department needs to focus on efforts to establish a foundation that will facilitate the accomplishment of these Benchmarks and allow us to achieve all of the Goals established in the Settlement Agreement. There are many important and competing interests that the Children's Administration is involved in, of which the Braam Settlement Agreement is a part. Our organizational capacity is stretched beyond its limits, which makes it essential that we choose the right strategies up front in order to move us the farthest and fastest. An example of carefully chosen strategies is using skilled-based interventions to help move us quickly towards increased placement stability for children in our care. We are working to address our capacity concerns through the supplemental budget process. Attached is a matrix showing the major initiatives and high level timeline and impact information in order to help the Panel understand the many different activities in which the Children's Administration and our social workers are involved.

Our initial cost analysis indicates additional staff are needed to address gathering the CAMIS data necessary to set the baselines, and the surveys or case review information needed because CAMIS does not currently capture the data. There will be on-going costs of measuring the data once the baseline is set up, and to address the workload, resource and organizational capacity issues that many of these Benchmarks and Action Steps require.

### **Professional Standards**

The Department is being measured by the Council on Accreditation (COA) against the professional standards COA has adopted. Because the panel does not have the authority to measure the Department, only COA should monitor compliance of the Department with these accreditation standards. In addition, the proposed COA 8<sup>th</sup> Edition standards have not yet been adopted. Please see the accompanying letter for more details.

Upon reviewing the standards in this report, we found that there are some that do not apply to the Braam Settlement Agreement. These are noted in our response to the report and in the letter.

Again, we appreciate all the work the Panel has completed and incorporated into the Design and Specifications report. We look forward to continuing our work with the Panel to improve our child welfare system. If you have any questions about any of the information we are including in our response to the December 5, 2005, report, please me let know.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Stephani  
Assistant Secretary  
Children's Administration

Attachments